

Learner profile: Romanian

This guide presents common challenges faced by Romanian learners of English and typical features of language production. Please note, these guidelines are intended to advise teachers on areas where students may experience problems. However, native speakers may not all find the following points challenging. It's important to note that Roma children may identify as Romanian for fear of persecution but speak Romani, a language closely related to Sanskrit and not mutually intelligible to Romanian.



Facts

- **Language family:** An Indo-European language and part of the Balkan Romance branch of the Romance group.
- **Native speakers:** Approximately 25 million.
- **Second language speakers:** Around 5 million.
- **Location:** Romanian is an official language in Romania, Moldova and Vojvodina in Serbia. Romanian is a recognised minority language in Bulgaria, Hungary and Ukraine.
- **Writing system:** Latin script.
- **Alphabet:** The Romanian language adds 5 more letters (ă, â, î, ș, ț) to the Latin script.

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Pronunciation

- Romanian native speakers frequently encounter problems with pronouncing the 'th' sound in the English language, as this sound does not exist in Romanian. It is often replaced with an 's' or 'z' sound.
- Some native speakers encounter trouble pronouncing the English 'r', which is usually rolled in Romanian.
- Some Romanian learners of English struggle with the differentiation of the tense and lax vowel distinction in minimal pairs (e.g. sheep and ship). Romanian does not have these vowel distinctions.
- The vowels in bird /ɜ:/, bear /eə/ and beer /ɪə/ are not in Romanian and, therefore, learners may struggle.

Grammar

- Romanian speakers may confuse English prepositions.
- Native speakers may translate sentences word-for-word from Romanian, such as using the verb 'to have' instead of 'to be' when expressing ages.
- There may be transfer from Romanian to English in terms of word order. Romanian native speakers may also have difficulties placing adverbs in sentences. Adverbs and adjectives are the same word in Romanian, which may lead to confusion in English.
- Romanian speakers may confuse the verbs 'tell', 'say', 'speak' and 'explain'. 'Tell' and 'say' are the same verb in Romanian: *spune*. There also might be difficulties remembering which verbs require prepositions, leading to mistakes such as 'I explain you'.
- Romanian only has five tenses so native speakers may struggle to understand continuous tenses and the differences between 'going to' and the future simple. There may be confusion between the past simple and the present perfect tenses.
- There might be confusion with the question words 'how', 'what' and 'why'.

Writing

- The capital 'I' has a dot above it in Romanian, but not in English. Children learn capital letters before lowercase letters in Romania and are not taught to read or write in schools until they are 7, so may not recognise or be able to write lowercase letters until they are older than 8 years old.
- Tendency to spell phonetically as Romanian has phonetic spelling.
- A comma is used for a decimal place (e.g. 1,25) in Romanian and a dot is used instead of a comma for writing large numbers (e.g. 125.000). The full stop might be called a 'point', which is a direct translation from Romanian.

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Vocabulary

- Romanian speakers might talk about 'making a good note' instead of 'getting a good grade', using a direct translation from Romanian.
- 'Stay' might be used instead of 'sit', 'wait' or 'stop' as one word is used for all these verbs in Romanian.
- The Romanian word for 'sentence' is *frază*, fraza a false friend with the English word 'phrase'.

Recommended FlashAcademy® lessons

Some lessons which might help based on the above differences:

Beginner > Letters and Numbers > Lesson 9

Beginner > Phonics 1 > Additional sounds

Beginner > Phonics 2 > Reading new sounds

Beginner > Phonics 2 > Different pronunciation 1

Beginner > Phonics 2 > Initial 'R' clusters

Beginner > Holiday & Travel > Ask a question

Beginner > Holiday & Travel > Past tense

Beginner > Holiday & Travel > Prepositions of Time

Beginner > Holiday & Travel > Prepositions of Place

Beginner > Shopping, Numbers & Colour > Present Continuous

Beginner > Health and Body > Past continuous

Beginner > English Language > Compound sentences and Complex sentences

Intermediate > Maths > Currency symbols

Intermediate > Family & Relationships > Say vs. Tell